

Interview with Edward S. Little

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR EDWARD S. LITTLE

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Mr. Ambassador, what brought you to have an interest in foreign affairs?

LITTLE: I went to the Fletcher School my first year after college.

Q: You had gone where before?

LITTLE: Swarthmore College. At that time you may remember the Foreign Service was an expatriate service.

Q: We're talking about when?

LITTLE: 1939 - 40, before the war. So I decided I did not want to get into the Foreign Service at that time, on the ground that it was an expatriate service. Then after the war, where I was four years in the Navy, I came back here to Washington. Jobs were not all that plentiful, and I knew some of my colleagues from the Fletcher School, talked to them, and I ended up in the State Department.

Q: What sort of work were you doing in the Navy?

LITTLE: I was in the Supply Corps, four years.

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Q: Did you travel much there?

LITTLE: One year at sea. The rest of it actually, after training, was here in Alexandria, which is why we came back here after the war, basically. I went to work for the State Department and never left.

Q: What sort of work did you apply for, and get, at the State Department?

LITTLE: I was doing staff work for the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, Will Clayton. That was my first job.

Q: Were you involved in the Marshall Plan business? You went in in 1947.

LITTLE: That's right. January. I was aware of the Marshall Plan, but I was not personally involved. I did the staff work, then I went to the Division of Economic Development in the Economic Bureau. I worked on Latin American affairs. This was 1948 - 49, as I remember. Then I went to the European Bureau, again doing some staff work.

Q: As an economist?

LITTLE: No, it was not. It was staff work. The paper-examination and shuffling job. For about a year and a half, I guess, I was staff assistant to the Assistant Secretary for European Affairs. Then I went to Madrid, as an economist.

Q: You worked for Will Clayton for a while? He's a rather seminal figure, particularly in economic affairs in the Department of State. How did you find his operating style?

LITTLE: He was involved in major policy and kept his eye on the ball, in that respect. I had very few personal contacts. A small staff. My very junior role didn't often get me into contact with him. Once, twice, three times in a year, something like that.

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Q: When you were in the State Department in a civil service job, what did you think of the Foreign Service? Did you have any impression of it while you were there, somewhat removed from it?

LITTLE: Highly competent Ivy Leaguers, pretty largely. They were very capable people, particularly in the European Bureau — very good. A lot of respect for them. The fact that there were many Ivy Leaguers didn't mean that I wouldn't have great respect for them; they were very competent. Ted Achilles was one of my bosses, and he was one of the pillars in the foundation of NATO, as you remember, the treaty.

Q: When you were there working, the European Bureau was, of course, quite busy at that time.

LITTLE: Very.

Q: When you went to Madrid from 1952 to '54, did you go there and become an FSO at that time?

LITTLE: No. There was a very small program of exchange of civil servants for Foreign Service officers to get the Foreign Service officers more experience in the department and vice versa. That was the basis upon which I went to Madrid as a Foreign Service reserve officer.

Q: This is before a great majority of positions in the Department were made Foreign Service positions.

LITTLE: That's right. Wristonizing.

Q: When the civil service and the Foreign Service were basically amalgamated?

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LITTLE: That was in 1955 -56, and it was then that I came into the Foreign Service, transferring laterally.

Q: About that time you got into Caribbean affairs. Was that in '56?

LITTLE: I came back from Madrid in '56, and I was in the Division of Economic Development again for a year. Dick Rubottom, who had been my boss in Madrid, came back from Madrid maybe four or five months before I did, to be Deputy Assistant Secretary—the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs. In those days, they had one deputy, and he was the alter ego. When the Assistant Secretary left or was away or whatever else it was, he became Acting Secretary. I think now they have five or six deputies. But they had one, and he was the Deputy. We had worked well and effectively, I think, together in Madrid.

I was in the Division of Economic Development, and Dick called me on the phone one day and said, “Ed, are you busy over there?”

I said, “Actually not, Dick.”

He said, “Do you want to come to talk to me?”

I said, “Yes.” So this led to the Caribbean affairs job which you mentioned, but it took eight to ten months, because the Economic Bureau maintained—probably correctly—that there was a shortage of economists. The fact was that I was grossly underutilized, in my view, and it was pretty boring, let me say, so when Dick asked would I like to come over to the Latin American Bureau, I said, “Great.” It took them about nine months to shoehorn me out, on this purely bureaucratic principle. Then, I went to the Latin American Bureau in September of 1957. I appeared there on a Monday.

Caribbean affairs was quite different from what it is now. Caribbean affairs, at that time, had to do with the independent countries of the area, which were only three. There was

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Cuba; the Chief of State was Batista. The Dominican Republic; the Chief of State was Trujillo. And Haiti. The Sunday before the Monday I reported to work, Duvalier won an election, so I had those three characters to deal with. Those were the problems that we were dealing with during that two years.

Q: How did we feel about this situation before Castro and all the turmoil, were we rather complacent about this situation?

LITTLE: We always had problems. We had continuing problems with each of the three countries in terms of what U.S. interests were. I never considered that we were "supporting." There are little elements in which we were.

Haiti. The new government killed a Lebanese-American, beat him up and killed him. That soured and controlled relations for a long, long time.

Dominican Republic. You had Trujillo; he wanted the blessing of the United States through sale of arms. As did Batista.

Castro was in the Sierra Maestra, eager to take over. There was a constant conflict of measuring U.S. interests in terms of requests for arms and that sort of thing from the Batista government.

Q: Do you feel that there was much attention paid to this area or was it only when an American got killed, or something like that to get as much attention?

LITTLE: Latin America at that time got very little attention in any event. These three countries had very little attention.

The only time I was ever in John Foster Dulles' office was when the Dominican Foreign Minister came and wanted to call on the Secretary of State. It was the Foreign Minister of

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the Dominican Republic, Dulles, Dick Rubottom, and myself. It was a non-meeting, really. Dulles was polite, but he seemed glad when the Foreign Minister went out the door.

Cuba, of course, got a lot of attention.

Q: This was the period of the insurgency?

LITTLE: Very much so, and what should the United States do? What was the name of The New York Times correspondent who went up in the mountains and interviewed Castro?

Q: It wasn't Tad Szulc, was it?

LITTLE: No. It was Herbert Matthews, but he got a lot of attention in the United States by virtue of his articles. Castro said he was a grand reformer—he made all the right noises.

Q: What were you doing on this? Do you feel you were getting good information on this, or was the embassy sort of giving you the Batista line?

LITTLE: I think we got good information. I think there was a basic difference between our ambassador, Earl Smith, and the office director, Bill Wieland in terms of what you should do. Smith, being on the spot, said that we should do more to support the then government. And the people in Washington in the Bureau, I think, were trying to work out a third alternative—a middle group, not Batista, not Castro, who would then be able to take over. That failed.

Q: What were your responsibilities at this time?

LITTLE: I wouldn't consider myself a policy maker but a digger-up of information in preparing a policy paper, after we talked it over within the Office of Caribbean and Mexican affairs and the front office.

Q: Where were you getting your information from?

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LITTLE: It came from the embassy, CIA, travelers. People from Washington would go there—from the Bureau—visit, talk to people in the embassy, talk to people outside the embassy.

Q: You didn't feel that we were under constraints as sometimes happens. I think in Iran at one time, prior to the revolution there in the late 'seventies. There was almost a lid on getting information that was not what we wanted.

LITTLE: I didn't feel that. A question is what was really going on. Sometimes our sources were not all that good. I remember one time in 1959, I think April or May, Castro visited here and spoke to the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Again, he was saying all the right things and putting the proper foot forward. He proposed X person, I've forgotten his name—to be the president. And this was going along and in May the desk officer for Cuba came in with a piece of paper, it was a CIA report that the president-to-be was a member of the Communist Party. Then Castro took over a lot of American properties, no compensation, it was clear to me that it was going rapidly downhill.

Then they offered me the job of DCM in Quito—both a good career opportunity plus getting out of that sticky mess.

Q: In Ecuador your ambassador was Maurice Bernbaum?

LITTLE: First it was Chris Ravndal, he was ambassador from when I arrived in September 1959, until May-June of 1960. Bernbaum came in in October of '60. I had two separate ambassadors.

Q: How would you describe Ravndal—his method of operation?

LITTLE: Both of them were excellent ambassadors and excellent chiefs. Ravndal was sensitive to such things as policy issues. He got around the country a lot, I think even more than Bernbaum did. Ravndal had a faculty of a photographic memory and he would

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write a speech in Spanish, let's say twenty pages. He would take page one and memorize that, then take two and so on until he had all twenty of them. And so he would make a speech in Spanish as if it were extemporaneous and it was just all up in his mind—phenomenal. He ran a good open shop, as did Bernbaum. No restraint on saying, “Well, Mr. Ambassador I think we ought to do so and so.” In either case open-minded, intelligent, balanced people.

Q: What were our interests in Ecuador at the time?

LITTLE: We had the usual type of aid mission with emphasis on education, sanitation, agriculture, that type of thing. I think they were effective. Working with the Navy in terms of joint training exercises with our Navy which made an annual trip around South America. I just want to add one more point; there was to be the Twelfth Inter-American Conference in Quito in 1960. One of the reasons I was sent there was because I knew the Washington scene. But that conference never took place.

Q: You were there during the Eisenhower Administration?

LITTLE: Correct.

Q: You left in '61 before the Kennedy Administration so you weren't into the Alliance for Progress.

LITTLE: About the time I left, the Peace Corps was announced and I wondered how that would work, I was sort of skeptical. No Peace Corps volunteers came when I was there. In contrast when I was in Chad there were fifty Peace Corps volunteers, and they were good.

Q: How were relations between Quito and Guayaquil? I'm speaking about the consulate there. Did it work? Apparently they are really two quite different worlds.

LITTLE: Yes they are.

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Q: One is up in the mountains and at Guayaquil you're right down on the coast.

LITTLE: An active port town.

Q: In Ecuador there's quite a difference between the people.

LITTLE: Yes.

Q: Was this reflected in the consulate?

LITTLE: Well there was no problem with coordination. Ward Allen was the consul general. He kept very close touch with the embassy. The ambassador or I would go down there fairly regularly.

Q: Did you have any problems with the government on your side getting the right information and talking to the right people?

LITTLE: No. I think it's fairly relevant that Ravndal had a scheme where about every six months he would organize a deep sea fishing party. He knew a man from whom he could rent the boat and accommodate twelve. It would be him, myself, one or two from the embassy and the rest were Ecuadorians. The Minister of Foreign Affairs on one trip. The Minister of Defense. The ambassador said, "No business is to be discussed on the trip." And of course, business was discussed, but after Ravndal left there was about a four-month gap. I had no trouble seeing the Foreign Minister or Defense Minister because the connection had been established on the fishing trips. A good technique.

Q: It sounds like an excellent way. I've never heard of that before.

LITTLE: Terrific.

Call up for an appointment, go right in, and you could talk freely. The association had been established by the ambassador's technique of a week-long fishing trip.

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Q: Excellent.

LITTLE: I think that's responsive to your question.

Q: That's right. How does one operate in the country?

LITTLE: He knew he was leaving and he particularly wanted me to come along on the fishing trips for that very reason. That's the kind of man he was.

Q: What type of government did they have in Ecuador at that time?

LITTLE: They had a democratic government. They had an election in June of 1960. Velasco Ibarra was one of the two candidates. He had been president two or three times before. Galo Plaza was the other candidate and he also had been president before.

Velasco, who was a demagogue, won. I think Ravndal had planned to move on in any event but his sympathies were not exactly with the demagogic Velasco. Velasco won the election, there was no question that he would take over. No threat of coup, although there are always threats of coup in Ecuador. Actually Velasco was overthrown by a coup about two months after I left in the fall of 1961. The military took over.

Q: He had a drinking problem, didn't he?

LITTLE: No, that was Arosemena. When I was working for Secretary Rusk in 1963-65, Arosemena became president. Carlos Arosemena. He came up on a State Visit. At the state dinner I was told that he knocked over a candelabra and nearly burned up the eighth floor of the State Department. I was not there, but that was the story.

Q: When you left Quito in '61 you then became a special assistant for quite a while. What were you doing?

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LITTLE: After the Bay of Pigs, they set up the Operation Center. Ted Achilles, the man I had worked for years before, was the head of it. When I was available he picked me up. The Operation Center was rudimentary at that time, I was to be the Latin American man. They didn't really know where they were going and they established a watch around the clock for the first time. Luke Battle was the Executive Secretary of the Department.

Q: Lucius Battle.

LITTLE: Lucius D. Battle. He had two deputies. I was working in the Operation Center. At one point he asked me if I wanted to come in to be one of his two deputies. Mel Manfull had the job and he was leaving, and I said I would, so I became Deputy Executive Secretary from April-May 1962 to the summer of '63.

Coby Swank was Special Assistant to Secretary Rusk and he wanted to go off, he had done the job for two years. It was a very demanding job. I was picked to take Coby's place in that job in July of '63.

Special Assistant to the Secretary involves a lot of different responsibilities. Review papers that come to him after they have been reviewed in the Secretariat. Are there any gaps? Does he really need to see this? Deciding whether he will. It's a traffic-cop job for papers. Also making sure that he gets all kinds of information, intelligence reports, tickers so the Secretary is up to snuff in terms of what's going on. Preparing plans for travel. Who he sees on foreign trips. A mixture of all sorts of things, eyes and ears as to what's going on. Assistant secretaries knew how to use a guy in my job, some of them did and some of them didn't.

Q: In a way you act as the traffic cop. One of the most important things in policy is that you have all these very articulate, dedicated people who want to get the Secretary's ear. For that period of time you are sort of a person who says, yes you can, no you can't.

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LITTLE: Yes and no. He had a secretary, called his personal assistant, who made the appointments. That person would often consult me in terms of what was a good idea and what was an unnecessary idea. That type of thing.

Q: How would you make some of these judgments? After all, we have global responsibilities. Would they come to you personally and say please I've really got to see the Secretary, can you do it, or I want him to get this information.

LITTLE: Sometimes, but generally it was done by memorandum, request for appointment, policy papers. Done in writing. People would ask my opinion as to how they could get in and how they could get a certain paper to him. Some of the papers were not "worthy", others should go to him.

Q: Since you were dealing with Secretary Rusk what was his operating style as far as what you saw?

LITTLE: Through staff meetings and personal meetings. He wanted to know what was going on. He wanted cogent documents presented to him for decision. If he had some thoughts, he used the phone a lot himself to assistant secretaries and others. To the White House. He was on the phone a fair amount. When issues came up he wanted to know everything relevant to make the decision. Regardless of where it came from.

Q: Was he easy to work for?

LITTLE: Tremendous. I really had a succession of wonderful bosses. He is a great gentleman. He was very considerate. I never saw him angry or upset. He was very controlled. He was really a wonderful man to work for.

Q: In one interview I talked to someone who was from the Middle East, I think this may have been because of our lack of attention in the Middle East, he said, "It's very difficult

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to get a decision out of Secretary Rusk.” He'd hear everything and say, “Well, that's very interesting,” and nothing would happen. But again this was the Middle East.

LITTLE: I've forgotten who the Middle East Assistant Secretary was. I don't know, maybe he didn't want to make a decision on something that somebody else...

Q: But you did find that decisions came out. Let's say people came in and talked to him and he made a decision. How did that come out?

LITTLE: There would be a paper that they would talk about with a recommendation; approve or disapprove. He would indicate on the paper what the decision was and then it would be in the out basket and one of us would follow up and make sure that the proper people knew. This is twenty-five years ago, my recollection is pretty good but . . .

Q: I understand when you're talking about how an individual paper worked.

LITTLE: They'd come out in his out basket. You knew from what came out what the decisions were. To my recollection he would not have somebody in there and say here's my decision. It was documented.

Q: Did you sit in on staff meetings?

LITTLE: Yes. The big staff meeting was across the hall. The Special Assistant's seat was right inside the door in case a secretary calls or the President is calling or something like that and take some notes on what was relevant for the Secretary's activities.

Q: How did he conduct his meetings?

LITTLE: Just go around the table and there were people against the wall who could speak up if they wished. Generally, around the table. First there was an INR briefing. Roger Hilsman or Tom Hughes gave oral briefings, five to ten minutes and then around the table.

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Q: Did he often share his thinking or was he usually absorbing the information?

LITTLE: The latter.

Q: Because of Vietnam and the whole Indo-Chinese thing and the fact that Rusk was a Far Eastern expert absorbed so much of his time that almost anything dealing with Europe or elsewhere was that often delegated to George Ball?

LITTLE: I don't think so. No. Bill Tyler was the Assistant Secretary for European affairs. He had plenty of access. He was one of the relatively few assistant secretaries who knew how to use my position; "Memorandum from EUR to the Secretary", and then there would be a little covering note. If he wanted something to be brought to the Secretary's attention, very sensitive, he would drop by and give me a little note and say, after it comes out would you destroy this. In his case there were various levels of getting the facts that he thought were important for the Secretary to have before him. Bill Tyler had a lot of access. I think Africa and Latin America were the only two areas which didn't get much of his attention; they would if necessary, from time to time, but they were generally on the back burner.

Q: Did you have the feeling that Vietnam became more and more absorbing to the upper leadership of the State Department?

LITTLE: Yes. The Buddhist priest burning themselves up and the Diem killing.

Q: Wasn't it prior to November of 1963 that the Buddhist priests were setting themselves on fire?

LITTLE: Wasn't it later than that? I left in July of '65.

Q: Diem was killed shortly before Kennedy, in the same month. It was November.

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LITTLE: That's right. The first big landings of American troops took place in August of '65. I had gone off to the War College a month or two before that happened.

Q: Did you notice a change after the death of Kennedy when Johnson came in? Did that have any change in emphasis in the State Department?

LITTLE: There had to be. Johnson was a very different kind of a man. From what I read and I heard, Kennedy was not going to retain Rusk after the next election. Rusk had a firm sense of the constitutional thing. He would brief the then vice president, Johnson, as I remember, orally before any trips Rusk went on. And afterwards. I don't know whether he cleared all this in the White House with Bundy or what but he was one of the few, I guess, who showed Johnson the respect of the vice presidency. When Johnson became president—not that I would say Rusk had a leg up—but he had been very proper in his conduct and therefore Johnson started off with confidence in him.

Then there were the Tuesday morning luncheons in which the President and Bundy and the Secretary of Defense and Rusk attended. Where they dealt with a lot of things. A lot of the paper flow revolved around the decision-making in terms of getting ready for those luncheons.

Q: What about things like the National Security Council. Were you in its information flow back and forth? Were they working to get to the Secretary or was the Secretary working to get to them or did they play much of a role?

LITTLE: When I had that job as Deputy Executive Secretary, the job was to control and deal with paper flow to the Secretary and to the White House. The flow of paper to the White House to Bundy was very, very voluminous.

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Bromley Smith, who was Executive Secretary of the National Security Council, was the initial recipient. He and I were on the phone several times every day when I was in that Deputy Executive Secretary job.

The flow of information in terms of paper and telephonic consultation was going on all the time.

Q: What about when the Secretary makes a decision which is more a policy decision than a personal decision or something within the State Department. Would that piece of paper and accompanying documentation go over to the NSC so they know what decisions had been made?

LITTLE: My recollection is not great but I can't conceive that anything that would be of interest to them would not have been sent to them as a matter of information.

Q: You didn't have a feeling that the Secretary was playing things very close to his chest. It was a very open relationship.

LITTLE: His and Bundy's relationship was very good in contrast of what it has been in recent years. Very good.

Q: You didn't look upon the NSC as the enemy or as maybe a friendly but a separate power doing its thing?

LITTLE: No. Some of the subordinate staff members of the NSC staff provided difficulties in terms of pushing things with, say, assistant secretaries, that had not been brought before the Secretary's attention. But this was generally ironed out.

Q: You were doing this until 1966?

LITTLE: '65, then I went to the War College.

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Q: Speaking of the War College, many people have said that the War College is a very good experience not because of what you learn there but because of the contacts you make with the military. Did you find this useful later?

LITTLE: Yes. Again, the door is open.

Q: It's equivalent to a year long fishing trip.

LITTLE: Yes. You call general so and so and you get a hearing as against a non-hearing or a brush- off.

Q: After that you went to Berne as the DCM from '66 to '69. How did you get that job?

LITTLE: Pure chance, like most of the other ones. I was in the War College. One thing about going through training like that is that as of a certain date you are available, as against being in a job where you can see what the possibilities are. You're available. In the fall of '65 I went to see the Executive Director of EUR. I thought I would like to go to a number two spot in Europe. I said to myself, I was number two in Latin America. I like being a DCM. I'll try it again. I told Fred Irving that and he said there wasn't much possibility because there wasn't much opening up. He mentioned Berne. I said, "Let's think about that." That started it on its way.

Q: When you were there the ambassador was John S. Hayes?

LITTLE: Yes.

Q: He's a non-career man. So you served as a DCM under two career officers, Ravndal and Bernbaum, before. Now, can you contrast that with serving somebody who is not a career person? Did your role change appreciably as DCM?

LITTLE: No. I think not, except that Hayes was a very bright man, very capable. I'm not one to say that he was a non-career therefore he wasn't competent. On the contrary,

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he was very competent. Because there wasn't all that much activity for two men like the ambassador or my own background, he did more on his own than the two career men that I had worked for before. That was his way and he was good at it.

Q: What was his background?

LITTLE: I think he was a vice president of the Washington Post for radio and TV stations and he had helped Lyndon B. Johnson in the '64 campaign with his television appearances. That's his background. He was bright.

Q: What were our principal interests in Switzerland and concerns at that time from '66 through '69?

LITTLE: Again, there wasn't all that much activity for two active individuals. I regarded Switzerland as a point of exchange of information between east and west. I told the ambassador I planned to do this and he said, "Fine." So it met over lunch with the number two men from all embassies, including the Soviet Union, Poland and Yugoslavia. I had a chance to at least keep the door open, nothing momentous went on, but it was an opportunity to talk about things, as far as I was concerned. In the days before I left, the first representative came from Washington to talk to the Swiss about a treaty which was signed two or three years later with respect to release of information on the secret Swiss bank accounts when criminal activity was alleged or demonstrated.

Q: This was at that time and for some time had been a matter of major concern because there was a feeling that Swiss bank accounts were being used to evade scrutiny by criminal elements.

LITTLE: That's right.

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Q: Now we're talking about drug elements. In those days it wasn't as much drug as other elements. Until there had been pressure from other areas of the world, the Swiss had kept these accounts secret. It was probably the major attention-making concern.

LITTLE: There was a concern which then developed into discussions with the Swiss and eventually a treaty.

Q: How did you find the Swiss to deal with?

LITTLE: Very good. Not as open as say the Ecuadorians. They're different types of people. I was there for three years and it took me about two years to get to the point where I had personal relationships. They're slow to pick up foreigners. But very, very good. Direct. Well informed. I enjoyed dealing with them.

There's one thing about the Switzerland experience which is demonstrative of what the officials were like. You may remember Stalin's daughter was there, Svetlana. She left India and went to Rome and then to Geneva. The Swiss gave her, in effect, entry for an unspecified period of time. We never saw her. The Swiss took care of her, they had her in a monastery in Fribourg, near Berne for a period. Then apparently the press got onto where she was. They thought they could find her there. Then she went to the house of one of the senior officials of the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office in Switzerland is called the Political Department. They have the minister and, as I remember, a deputy minister. Then they divide the world into two parts—east and west. The gentleman who handled the east part was in charge of Svetlana and her well being. The gentleman in the west had a house outside of Berne. Do you know Switzerland?

Q: Not too well.

LITTLE: Lake Thun—there's a little village called Oberhofen. He and his wife had a little place up on the mountain overlooking Lake Thun. They moved Svetlana from Fribourg

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—she went there. I didn't know this until later. Part of the approach was that the United States officials did not know where she was and were not in touch with her.

I remember Marvin Kalb came. The press was all over Berne trying to find her. The ambassador had been planning to go to Bonn for a chiefs of mission meeting just about this time. We talked it over and we thought he ought to just go ahead. Otherwise, why is the ambassador canceling his plans? I was then the charg#. Marvin Kalb came around. He's very alert and bright. The questions he asked were easy for me to answer. Did I know where she was? No, I didn't. That sort of thing. Had I seen her? No, I had not. So he quickly retreated because he knew that I didn't know anything. I didn't have to tell any untruths. Simply that I didn't know.

Then the Swiss got a little restless, they didn't want to have her there forever. It was an annoyance. Washington sent us authorization to issue her a visitor's visa. So I told the man who handles the east—Svetlana at that time being in the house of the man who handles the west. I told the man who handles the east that this was the way it was. He said if I came down the next day he would have her passport. Is this of interest?

Q: This is of interest. Yes.

LITTLE: How we dealt with it. The ambassador went away and we dealt with it by not knowing—properly not knowing what was going on. I went down and I picked up the passport around quarter till five. I think our office hours were till five o'clock. I called the consul and I said, "Bob, after you close up, could you come up to me office?" The ambassador was back and we talked about how we would handle this. This was Bob Ode.

Q: Who later was a hostage in Tehran.

LITTLE: Yes. He had retired then went back for six months and got caught there.

Q: He was a hostage during the 444 days.

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LITTLE: In Tehran. Bob came up to my office and I said, "I've got a little assignment for you." I showed him the telegram from the Department authorizing the visa and I said, "Here is Stalin's daughter's passport. Would you be good enough to go down and open up your safe and put the visa in and then bring it back to me?" He said, "Fine." I went downtown the next morning and gave the passport back to the man who handled the east and in about forty-eight hours she was on a plane from Zurich to New York.

Why were we there? We didn't know that Stalin's daughter was going to defect. We were there to take care of it at arm's length.

Q: Switzerland being a neutral ground, did you have many defections or run-of-the-mill type people asking for refugee status?

LITTLE: Very, very few that I recollect. The major influx of refugees was after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Russians in the spring of '69. You'd see all these cars that had "CS" for Czechoslovakia. The Swiss had given them haven.

Q: Did the embassy get involved in doing anything with them?

LITTLE: No. The Swiss handled it. I may be wrong, but it's my clear recollection that we were not involved in that.

Q: I couldn't decipher from the Foreign Service list what you were doing when you left Berne in 1969. You went to the State Department until 1974. What were you doing then?

LITTLE: I was country director for what they called North Coast Affairs in the Latin American Bureau. What it meant was relations with Venezuela and Colombia.

Q: Was the oil the major problem with you then?

LITTLE: Venezuela.

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Q: Venezuela was oil.

LITTLE: In fact, I learned a lot about the petroleum business at that time because Venezuela was the principal producer in Latin America and as a side hat I became the Latin American petroleum man. Whenever the regional bureaus met with the Fuels and Energy Office of the Economic Bureau, I was the Latin American person. It was an interesting education.

Q: Were we having some trouble with Venezuela at the time? Weren't they getting caught in some quotas and things like that?

LITTLE: Petroleum. At that time the United States wanted to restrict the importation of foreign oil into this country in favor of the domestic producers and there were quotas and the Venezuelans hoped that they would be increased. Colombia also produced oil as well as coffee.

Q: Now, we're talking about 1989. Cocaine and Colombia are synonymous.

LITTLE: And Peru. But at that time there were insurgencies so that the ambassador in Bogota always traveled with a follow car, even then. But it was insurgency, not the drug problem.

Q: Was there any particular problem that took up most of your time on North Coast Affairs?

LITTLE: The petroleum was the main thing. There was a State Visit by the President of Venezuela in June of '70. That's a time consuming operation. Petroleum was the principal concern. There were border disputes between Venezuela and Guyana and between Venezuela and Colombia.

Q: Why would we care?

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LITTLE: We didn't want things to blow up. Also we had problems of arms sales. Venezuela wanted some things that would put them ahead of Colombia and we didn't want that. For instance there was the F-4; Venezuela wanted F-4s.

Q: The F-4 is what?

LITTLE: A fighter-bomber. Venezuela wanted them and we ended up turning them down. Really to keep the so-called “even hand” in terms of arms between the two of them.

Q: Often in our policy the fact that we'd like to sell arms to people but this turns into a policy thing, it's not just a matter of sales. Don't you have to worry about the impact?

LITTLE: Relationship with the other countries—more than one normally.

Q: Did you have much dealing with Congress—pressure groups from the petroleum group coming and breathing down your neck?

LITTLE: Petroleum companies, but they were generally handled by the Economic Bureau. Although, we had plenty of contacts with them but less than the Economic Bureau.

Q: I'd like to move on now to your time in Chad. That was a rather exciting time wasn't it?

LITTLE: Just a little coup d'etat.

Q: You were appointed in 1974 to Chad. How did this appointment come about? The ambassadorial appointment is always a matter of lots of negotiations and things happening.

LITTLE: As anything else, there's a large chance factor. One of my colleagues, not having been able to get an ambassadorial appointment, said, “You have to have a sponsor”—his phrase. Since I was the Senior Country Director in ARA.

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Q: ARA is American Republics.

LITTLE: American Republics Bureau. When assistant secretaries were changed in early 1973, a new assistant secretary came in. About that time Secretary Rogers was scheduled to go on a two to two and a half week trip to Latin America. Again, the Secretaries of State hadn't done that very much. I don't know why he wanted to at that time. Maybe he was being pushed by the Latin American Bureau.

The new Assistant Secretary wanted somebody who had some continuity in the Bureau to go along on the trip. So I was exposed to the Secretary of State—at that time William Rogers. Meanwhile, Kissinger was eager to get the job. After the Rogers trip I was asked what I wanted to do next. I had been in that job—Country Director, for four years and they were making some changes. I said, modestly, “I'd like to be a chief of mission.” Then I talked to the Director General, this is exposure. I had French. Do you remember the GLOP program?

Q: Yes.

LITTLE: Global Outlook Program—a Kissinger program. It was to get Foreign Service officers experience in more than one region so that they would have a global outlook. I was a product of the GLOP program.

They were then talking about my going to Africa as well as many Latin American places. I was clearly in the stream. Then Kissinger took over the job—a whole new ball game. I talked to Dave Newsom about ten days afterwards; he said, “It's a whole new ball game, Ed.” I said, “I think you're right.”

Q: At that time David Newsom was Assistant Secretary for African affairs.

LITTLE: Yes. We were talking about going to Niamey at that time. Then Kissinger came in and I got some exposure to him when he was in New York in September of that year.

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Also there was a meeting in Mexico City in February of '74 which I also went to as sort of an odds and ends advisor. He knew who I was. Then there was a question of—my name sort of bubbling up again—more possibilities. Then Chad came along.

Again, I think in terms of the reality of it, many of the people who had a lot of experience in Latin America had no language other than Spanish or Portuguese. I had that other little facet to my background (French), so off I went to French-speaking Chad.

Q: When you went there in 1974, what were our interests in Chad at that time?

LITTLE: Basically to fly the flag. The Soviets had a mission there. The East Germans did. We were interested in agricultural production. Chad is one of the poorest countries in the world in terms of a made up number of the per capita GNP. It has to be made up because they don't know—they don't have information.

They produce cotton, skins, hides and that sort of thing but not much else. They had some potential for agricultural development. That was the basis on which our aid program was worked out. A fair number of interesting projects to meet that. Then the coup d'etat came. Then again, that was another ball game.

Q: When you arrived there what was the situation before the coup d'etat?

LITTLE: Tombalbaye, then president, had been president since 1960 when Chad became independent. Authoritarian—if he saw somebody who might be a threat they were either imprisoned or exiled. The brighter one's were exiled. He was just ruling the country in that manner. No elections.

Q: Had he rejected wheat relief and all this before you arrived?

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LITTLE: That was when I was getting ready to go and Kissinger said, "We won't send them any." It was a question of the aircraft flying to the northern part of the country. I've forgotten what the issue was.

Q: New York Times correspondent Henry Kamm had said that there was a gross mismanagement of wheat relief—or one of the perennial famines there. Tombalbaye had said, "The hell with you," and rejected our wheat.

LITTLE: And then Kissinger said, "Okay, we'll take our planes out of there." That's what happened.

Q: There was also the charge—which I guess is probably true, it's a normal thing—that aid people had been charging the Chadian government for their hotel bills or something like that?

LITTLE: I don't have a recollection of that.

Q: There had been a famine, I take it?

LITTLE: That is correct. Yes. In the central parts of the country.

Q: Because of President Tombalbaye's action, we had stopped sending wheat?

LITTLE: I think that was in September- October of '74. I got there in mid-November.

Q: So you didn't arrive at a very auspicious time.

LITTLE: A little bit of history but the new chief of mission had no connection with it, of course, so I could sort of ride out that one.

Q: Sometimes it's handy, for no person's fault, when the new chief of mission comes it often is seen by the people you're coming to signifying a change of policy. Or at least

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being used for that purpose so that you felt that you — could you take advantage of this somehow?

LITTLE: I didn't think of it as a current issue at that time.

Q: Could you describe a little how you saw Chad. The government was run by a ruler who was very much running things. How would you describe the country? It's a big country.

LITTLE: Yes. 496,000 square miles.

Q: What was the situation with the people?

LITTLE: They had very little opportunity. Ineffective bureaucracy. But the Chadians were very nice people.

Q: Was there a difference between the northerners and southerners?

LITTLE: Very much so. At that time the southerners ran the government to the considerable resentment of northerners. There was an insurgency in the north at that time run by the northerners.

Q: Was Libya playing a role in that?

LITTLE: No.

Q: Later Libya became sort of a mischief maker there.

LITTLE: Very much so.

Q: Libya was not a factor in those days?

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LITTLE: Except about a year before that, they claimed a strip of land at the north. But there was nobody there anyway. The basic problems were really this insurgency in the north.

The French, you may remember, had 3000 troops there. They were the dominant ones. The French Ambassador, regardless of his seniority, was always the dean of the diplomatic corps. There was a French woman who had been kidnapped by the people in the north and held there. French television had flown in some people from the north. Not through the capital. They recorded something about how she felt, she was weeping. That was on French television. The French Government, again with 3,000 troops—both Army and Air Force—right outside the capital. The French provided what they called non-lethal equipment to the people in the north. The leader of the insurgence in the north was a gentleman by the name of Habré. He is now president of the republic. He was the one who kidnapped this lady archeologist. The French Government providing this so called non-lethal equipment infuriated the then government of Chad which was a military government after the coup d'état. The government told the French to take their troops out within 30 days. This was a definite break with France and the French Ambassador was no longer the dean of the diplomatic corps. There was a change in ambassadors, and when the new man came in he was not dean. The insurgency went on and eventually there was civil war—considerably after I left. Then Habré became the president. He won. The northerners won.

Q: You had been there not quite six months when there was this coup on April 13th, 1975. What happened to you? What was your experience during the coup?

LITTLE: On a Sunday morning at about five o'clock my wife went out on the balcony from our bedroom—she said, "Is that thunder?" It was a perfectly clear sky and I said, "No. That's gunfire." This was at five o'clock on that particular Sunday. It wasn't too far away. It lasted about three to three and a half hours. Then it got quiet.

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Meanwhile, our own defense attach# had come by the house. We talked about it a little bit. The DCM's residence was right next door—we talked. The assistant attach# went by and picked up the secretaries who lived fairly close to where all the gunfire was and he brought her safely back. I listened to what was going on on the local radio. There was a street just outside the residence that lead to the presidential compound and where I was downstairs I could observe activity on the street.

Finally, at about nine or nine-thirty in the morning, a whole bunch of troops came in trucks from the direction of the presidential compound and they cried, "We've won!" I said to myself, "Who's we? Are they the president's group or the army that had 'won'?" At around two o'clock that same day the DCM and the military attach# said if it was all right they would like to down to our chancery, which was downtown. I told them it would be okay. They went and looked around. There wasn't much going on, but they got into the building and then came on back.

The fight was entirely internal. No foreigners were involved. We just laid low—"stand fast."

Q: In the older government with Tombalbaye, did you have any relations with him?

LITTLE: Very few. During ceremonial functions he would always be pleasant—such as greeting Mobutu when he came on a State Visit. That sort of thing. They lined up the so-called diplomatic corps on the airport tarmac. It was all very pleasant but never any substantive discussions. I talked to the foreign minister sometimes on substantive matters and other ministers. Literally almost by the time I had made my formal calls, they'd changed the government.

Q: Was there any problem of recognition or anything like that with the new government?

LITTLE: Continuity—that was the way we did it when we didn't want to make a stir. Continuity—continuing relations with the new government.

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Q: Did Washington have any instructions?

LITTLE: Yes.

Q: What sort of instructions were they?

LITTLE: I've forgotten. We probably sent a message in saying that the new authorities appeared to be in control and recommended that we continue relations with them. After authorization from Washington, we would have sent a note to that effect to the Foreign Office. About two or three days later the new president called the diplomatic corps and consular corps together to tell them about what had happened and to tell them that everything would be all right.

Q: Was there any real change with the new government?

LITTLE: No. But it was more open. I remember the new military Junta had a reception for, I guess, chiefs of mission and a few others. This was after we had resumed and continued relations. There had been this meeting called by the president and I said to the Chief of Protocol, "Are we now able to call on ministers and other people in the new government?" He said, "Everything is normal." Of course, it wasn't normal but what he was saying was there were no formal restrictions and we could go out and make our appointments with the ministers. Which we did.

I called on the new foreign minister who had been a major in the army. He had his combat boots and uniform on when I called on him. He was a much more outgoing person than the former foreign minister. He was friendly, smiling and very bright. My relations with the foreign minister were personally closer than they had been with the other one who was a pretty unapproachable type of person.

Q: Was our interest in the country at that time minimal?

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LITTLE: Yes. The Soviets were there. They were pretty unobjectionable. The Soviet ambassador did the proper things in terms of inviting us over for dinner and a show of Russian propaganda films and that sort of thing. Friendly.

The Soviet ambassador said, "Let's play some volleyball together." We had a home-and-home arrangement with the Soviet Embassy for volleyball games. They beat the hell out of us. They really did. They had a trainer of volleyball to train the Chadians. He did not play, but he was a very fair umpire. We had home-and-home and they would offer beer and Vodka. Everybody was very pleasant, and we did the same thing in return.

Q: Were you there when the Peace Corps was there?

LITTLE: Yes. They were there when I arrived. Fifty of them.

Q: How effective was the Peace Corps?

LITTLE: As I remember they did two basic things. Well drilling—show them how to get water. Which was pretty important. And English language instruction. You wonder what are we doing teaching people English but the well drilling was good, and there was reforestation. They were involved in those things. As I said there were fifty of them. There was never any problem with any of the volunteers. They did a good job.

Q: Did we have an aid program then?

LITTLE: We had an aid program. Basically on the development of agriculture—wheat—the details escape me. The aid representative was enthusiastic but in my judgment he was a bit of an empire builder and he wanted this program, that program, that program. My feeling was that if we got the Chadians sold on a largish program and the results were minimal we would suffer. So I insisted on a very gradual, careful increase in "X" number of experts, up to a certain level—I've forgotten what it was, but not outstanding in terms of

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people all over the countryside. Not at all. Just get the Chadians' expectations so high that we couldn't fulfill them. I thought we'd lose.

Q: Was there concern about what was the effect of any of these programs on the spreading of the desert—the drought area, or not?

LITTLE: I wasn't there long enough to get into the assessment stage. I thought a lot of them were worthwhile. Then they would sort of go ahead. I just don't know what happened later on.

Q: Things were on a fairly even keel when you were there, outside of having a coup in your backyard?

LITTLE: Yes. And the new military government was interested in buying weapons from the United States and I thought the French should be doing that.

Q: When the French had their 3000 troops kicked out within a month, and all that and the French Ambassador put in his place by the government there wasn't an effort on our part to try to step into their place then?

LITTLE: It's a former French colony, and commercially, and in other ways they were the dominant power. As a matter of fact I thought we should not step in, as you said, on that contrary, just to be there—some minor help but don't in any try to supplant. The French came back during the Libyan incursion—2,000 troops came back plus aircraft. I think the aircraft were important. By that time we had given them military assistance, but I assume in tandem with the French.

Q: There was no particular pressure from the military attach#s to get more involved? Or CIA, or anything like that?

LITTLE: Negative. CIA had a special role there but not relating to that at all.

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Q: You retired in 1976?

LITTLE: No. I retired in '79. I went to work in an intelligence job in 1976. I worked in the intelligence community staff which is an interagency group, interagency in the sense of DIA, CIA, State, FBI and all the other intelligence agencies. In general it was a coordinative role in providing an opportunity for other agencies to speak their piece on intelligence matters.

Q: What was your impression of the coordination? These separate empires that really had a very uneasy alliance of trying to—would they hoard their information or do you think there was pretty good sharing?

LITTLE: A bit of both I think. In fact, this job I had was the first Foreign Service job except for one middle-grade officer, in the intelligence community staff. It was a pioneering effort. I was told that Colby was the one who wanted to have an ex-ambassador. William E. Colby—director of CIA.

But by the time that I got out there, there was a gentleman by the name of George Bush who was director of central intelligence. He was director when I was out there and then Turner came in.

Q: Stansfield Turner.

LITTLE: Yes. Stansfield Turner, he was the director of Central Intelligence. I was at Langley for almost two years and then this headquarters down town which they established, for about four or five months. Two years was plenty for that. Then I went into the Inspection Corps from there in the summer of '78.

Q: Back on the intelligence side. Was there a difference in quality and all between the defense intelligence agency and the central intelligence agency and all the contributors—did you feel that one sort of swamped the other?

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LITTLE: No. I think there were a lot of highly competent professionals. I often thought that the defense attach#s abroad, being there last before retirement, it's too bad and yet I can understand an officer—military officer feeling that if he has promotional possibilities he wants to be in the swim, and defense attach#s are clearly not. Some of them are very good but they are not in command positions or positions where they can build on for promotion to star rank.

Q: This is really true in the Foreign Service, too. Although we have a different role. There are certain positions that you really should be in if you want to continue to rise. For the most part. I've heard the complaint that the attach#s, particularly in places such as Latin America often are used as retirement jobs for colonels and the system suffers.

Looking back on you career what do you consider your greatest accomplishment—the thing that gave you the greatest satisfaction?

LITTLE: I guess professionalism and I think not being stampeded when there were elements trying to stampede one into a decision which you may not have thought was a good decision at all. Some awfully fine colleagues whom I have enjoyed. Still keep in touch with many of them. I know that people are saying that the Foreign Service's morale is low but as far as I can remember they've always said the morale is low. Maybe I'm thinking back overly fondly, but I liked the associations with the people—enjoyed them. I enjoyed the associations with the people in the countries that I served in.

Q: Would you recommend the Foreign Service as a career to young people today?

LITTLE: Absolutely, if they are prepared to take the danger that comes along with it. We didn't have it quite so dangerous. In Quito there was an attack on the chancery when I was there. It's not very pleasant when you see 300 people marching against you— you don't know whether the police will hold them or not.

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Q: What happened, did they hold them?

LITTLE: Yes they did. The police had training from a unit—AID unit on security and they held them. But they had attacked the embassy before that—broke a lot of windows and things like that.

Q: Why were they attacking you?

LITTLE: This had to do with the Rio protocol of 1942, which was signed in Rio to guarantee the boundary between Ecuador and Peru, which had been in great dispute. There were four guarantor powers of that protocol which set the boundaries—the Brazilians, the Americans, the Argentines and the Chileans. The new president Velasco Ibarra declared the Rio protocol “void” after he became president. And the guarantor powers said, “You can't do that.” That was what triggered the attack on the embassy. The Brazilians had maybe one rock thrown at them. I don't think the Argentines or the Chileans had anything but there was a physical attack on our chancery building which was very new at that point. Then after the early morning attack they came back in the afternoon with 300 demonstrators moving down the street to the chancery.

Q: Did that sort of settle itself eventually?

LITTLE: It just sort of went away. The new foreign minister called Ambassador Bernbaum in, and he and I went in. We were given a note about this attack on our embassy which they in their Ecuadorian version referred to “a justifiable attack.” Maurie Bernbaum, bless him, said, “You can't use that word 'justifiable.'” They took it out of the note. Bernbaum was a great chief of mission—great boss.

Q: I want to thank you very much for this. It's been very interesting.

End of interview